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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#) [MD](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT VORONIN WORRIED ABOUT POSSIBLE "INCIDENT" PROVOKED
BY RUSSIA AND TRANSNISTRIA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kelly Keiderling for reasons 1.4(b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an October 7 meeting President Voronin told DAS David Merkel that he was more concerned about Transnistria now than at any point in his presidency. Voronin believed that Russia wanted to take over the negotiating process to the exclusion of the other 5-plus-2 members. Russia had failed to deliver the Transnistrians to the negotiating table in Vienna, and might even engineer an "incident." However Voronin reported his commitment to the 5 plus 2 format and refused to sign a separate document. Voronin wanted the EU to do more to help relieve Moldova's dependence upon Russia through increased trade visas and peacekeeping, and took on board DAS Merkel's recommendations that Moldova could reinforce its democratic credentials by conducting free and fair parliamentary elections in ¶2009. Merkel assured Voronin that the USG would continue being actively engaged with Moldova and helpful through the 5 plus 2 process. End summary.

Russia Wants to Exclude Others from Process

¶2. (C) Merkel expressed USG disappointment that Transnistria had decided not to participate in the 5-plus-2 meeting scheduled for October 7-8 in Vienna. Merkel noted that Russia had failed to use its leverage to press Transnistria to attend and perhaps had even pressured in the other direction. Merkel explained that he had come to Chisinau in order to demonstrate the USG commitment to Moldova and the 5-plus-2 process.

¶3. (C) Voronin thanked Merkel for U.S. interest and warned that the Russians wanted to push Moldova into holding bilateral negotiations with the "separatist authorities." Russia was insisting on a 1-plus-1 format, said the President, to hold talks without other members of the process participating. As a result, explained Voronin, he had made several firm declarations that negotiations could take place only within 5-plus-2 and that all other formats were merely consultations. (Comment: Voronin is in a very good place feeling more confident that while progress may not happen before elections, a 5 plus 2 format will produce a document that will enjoy greater domestic and international support. End Comment.)

Concerns about Russian and Transnistrian Armed Forces

¶4. (C) Though all appeared calm on the surface, Voronin stated that he was "more concerned about the Transnistria situation than at any point in his past seven years as President." He noted that Smirnov had started engaging armed factions drawing upon those with Russian citizenship. Voronin said that he had operational information that the Transnistrians had begun buying Moldovan police uniforms, (for possible provocative acts.)

¶5. (C) Voronin believed that Smirnov would be willing to accept a round of armed conflict in Transnistria now in order to postpone negotiations for another five years. Given Smirnov's age, that would be enough time for him, opined the President. Voronin suggested that if Smirnov continued to delay participation in negotiations, perhaps

the group should hold negotiations without him.

¶16. (C) Voronin said as a part of a possible settlement he would support introduction of European peacekeeping forces into Transnistria. Voronin allowed that Russia might participate to a small extent in a European force through the CIS. In addition to the 750 Russian military troops in Transnistria, there were also 1,800 Russians within other armed groups, noted Voronin with concern.

¶17. (C) Merkel warned that Russia might instigate a provocation in hopes of having the GOM react in a "certain" way, as Georgia had done. He noted that the U.S. relationship with Russia had changed, and that we now had to deal with the Russia that existed, not the Russia we wanted. The Russians had set a trap in Georgia, which the Georgians had walked into at great cost. The U.S. and the international community would demonstrate that Georgia had a bright future, and show that they had options. Similarly, after Georgia, Merkel pointed out that the U.S. and the EU need to demonstrate that we are more involved in Moldova and other countries on Russia's periphery by supporting 5 plus 2.

Reducing Russian Influence Through EU Trade

¶18. (C) President Voronin wanted the EU to do more on trade, a visa regime, and eventual Moldovan accession to the union. On trade, the President noted that back in 2001 80 percent of Moldova's trade was with Russia and only 20 percent with other partners. The balance had now moved to 50-50, with clear possibility for improving to 30-70, thereby escaping dependence upon the Russian market. With increased exports to Europe, Moldova would remain dependent only on Russian gas and gas pipelines. President Voronin noted that an

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improved visa regime between the EU and Moldova would give much greater incentive to residents of Transnistria to hold Moldovan passports.

¶19. (C) Merkel believed that the EU was coming to realize the importance of the Eastern Partnership. Merkel had discussed with EU officials in Brussels the need for the EU to accelerate its mandate with Moldova. Merkel said they had also discussed a reconstruction fund, the need for more high-level visits, and the importance of the EU's and Ukraine's commitment to the future of EUBAM. Merkel noted that he had not yet raised the visa regime and the need for increased trade and promised to do so in future talks. This was a good opportunity, he continued, as the Europeans were paying more attention to Moldova now.

¶110. (C) Merkel suggested that the upcoming elections provided a good opportunity for Moldova to be seen in a more positive light by the EU. If the elections were conducted well, Moldova might find itself moving ahead of Ukraine on the EU agenda.

Ukraine is an Additional Problem

¶111. (C) Voronin pointed out that Ukraine also had influence on Transnistria, and posed an additional problem for Moldova. He claimed unconfirmed information that Ukraine planned to cease its activity in EUBAM. Voronin expressed his gratitude for the introduction of EUBAM, noting that it had disappointed both Russia and Transnistria because arms trafficking had stopped. It would be a pity if Ukraine stopped collaborating with EUBAM, he concluded. Merkel relayed commitments he had heard in Kyiv and Brussels to EUBAM's continuance.

¶112. (C) In response to Merkel's question, Voronin said that he had no plans to visit Ukraine, but noted that President Yushchenko had requested to visit October 18-19, days which unfortunately coincided with the visit of the president of Montenegro.

Comment

¶113. (C) After months of pushing for a settlement in time for

elections, Voronin appears to have given up on this timeframe. Feeling Russian pressure to dominate the settlement process, he is trying instead to resist the Russians and stand firm on the need to remain within the 5-plus-2 process. The Moldovan president is looking to the EU and the U.S. to help reduce Russia's leverage on Moldova. After the events in Georgia, the cloud of a possible provocation in Transnistria now hangs over his head. He does not trust the Russian "peacekeeping" troops, and has evidence to justify his fears that Smirnov may be considering a provocative action. This is the time when the USG most needs to increase its engagement with Moldova. Robust engagement will help keep Moldova from following the Russian script and becoming a vassal state.

¶14. (U) DAS Merkel has cleared this cable.

KEIDERLING